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ABSTRACT

An informal survey in 19 public elementary schools in Seattle, Washington, revealed what teachers and principals feel should be the basic preservice experiences and teaching responsibilities of reading specialists. It was summarized that reading specialists should be able to answer positively the following questions and their implied subquestions: (1) How well do they relate to people? (2) How well informed are they about how children learn? (3) How well do they understand the language that children bring to school? (4) How well can they teach the many tools of communication? (5) How well do they appraise children? (6) How well do they know and use many approaches to reading? (7) How well do they know how to develop independent reading? and (8) How well do they know what children are reading? The author saw little need for specialists to serve as clinicians in a clinical setting in an elementary school. Rather, it was felt that reading specialists should be able to operate with whatever space, materials, and equipment are available within the monetary limits of the system within which they work. And finally, he concludes that reading specialists should be willing to do anything short of immorality to teach children the tools that they need to get through our system as it is set up. (VJ)

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PRESERVICE EXPERIENCES AND TEACHING RESPONSIBILITIES FOR SPECIALISTS IN READING

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After discussing what should be the preservice experience and teaching responsibilities of specialists in reading with my own staff, I decided to take this topic afield. To question the faculties of a variety of elementary schools and to get their reactions, I visited nineteen schools in our King County. It was interesting to me that most of the responses to the experiences and responsibilities were put in the form of questions, such as: Have they worked with primary youngsters as an observer, as a teacher's aide, and as a tutor? Can they provide learning experiences at the learning level of all the children for whom they are and will be responsible? Do they relate the learning experiences to the now world of the child? Do they evaluate not only the child's performance but also their own performance with children, teachers, and parents? Can they make assignments that fit the needs of children?

As I went from school to school, I began to sense that the same responses were being repeated, albeit the wording might change. As I analyzed the responses for samenesses and differences, I found that they fell nicely into eight general categories. For purposes of consistency, I converted all statements into questions. Upon examining the questions, I found that those that related to teaching responsibilities implied corresponding preservice experiences. I put together the questions about the teaching responsibilities and then placed them under their appropriate

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category. These questions specify the kinds of preservice experiences that specialists in reading should have.

The eight categories cover such areas as: 1) human relationships; 2) learning theory; 3) language; 4) tools of communication; 5) evaluation; 6) approaches to reading; 7) independent reading; and 8) children's interests in books. I have ordered them in what I personally feel is their order of importance to the child. Also, I have put the category headings themselves into question form, followed by their subquestion--thus:

1) How well do they relate to people? Have they had experience with Black and White? Chicano and Makah? Slow and Average? Retarded and Gifted? Will they respect the dialects that youngsters bring to the classroom? Have they worked successfully with primary children? With intermediate youngsters? Do they work well with classroom teachers? Principals? Can they utilize the nurse, social worker, and psychologist as resource people? Conference with parents?

2) How well-informed are they about how kids learn? To what extent does their performance demonstrate the awareness that all children have a natural potential for learning? That kids learn mostly through their senses? That the basis for all learning is each youngster's own activity as he interacts with his physical and social environment? That children learn best in an environment that motivates and nurtures success? That feedback, discovery, stress, and transfer also foster learning?

3) How well do they understand the language that children bring to school? That language is behavior? That children develop a variety of behaviors and competencies in language before they go to school? That talk involves body movements, facial expressions, touch, highs and lows, softs and louds? That a child's basic vocabulary

includes what he possesses, understands, and uses? That the basis for reading instruction should be the language and thinking of each child? That a child's performance in reading and writing will not surpass his ability to understand and use the spoken language? That talk and the other tools of communication are inextricably interrelated?

4) How well can they teach the many tools of communication? Can they provide a good speech environment? Record pupil talk? Carry on choral reading and choral speaking? Dramatization? Role playing? Improvisations? Puppetry? Use listening posts? Do they understand the alphabetic principle? Have fun with the alphabet? Secret Codes? Can they sequence lessons to attain phonic objectives? Develop structural analysis? Word building? Work toward linguistic fluency? Do they know how to expand the kernel sentences into more complex structures? Do they coordinate reading and writing activities? Literature and language learnings?

5) How well do they appraise children? Can they construct or select and administer an Informal Reading Inventory? An Attitude and Interest Inventory? Other tests as needed? Are they good observers of children? Do they analyze case study results? Do they use questions as a diagnostic tool? Can they determine the readiness needs of a child, small group, or class? Do they translate children's needs based on test results into recommended classroom practices utilizing recommended relevant materials easily acquired? Do they make appraisals periodically to find whether or not they are reducing the gap between the functional reading level of each child and his grade placement?

6) How well do they know and use many approaches to reading? Do they know how to tune into a child's nervous system when the language experience approach is called for? Use a field trip as a common experience for classroom discussion and class recording? Demonstrate the phonemic approach, emphasizing sound-letter relationships,

word order and meaning, sentence patterns, and paragraph patterns? Present words in phonemic and graphemic groups? Do they know a variety of basal readers and their controlled vocabulary approach? Have they guided successfully youngsters step-by-step through the acquisition of reading skills using programmed instruction? Do they know how to extend the language experiences of children and develop an individualized reading appraoch? And in the final analysis, can they be eclectic, selecting those approaches that best serve the needs of children in their care?

7) How well do they know how to develop independent reading? Do they develop basic library skills? Library tools? Do they assist children in book selection? Do they encourage wide reading of literature? Use inquiry and discovery techniques? Can they develop excellent reading habits? And the habit of reading? Book sharing: individual and group? Extend learning through reading?

8) How well do they know what the children are reading? Will they help the children unravel the secret of Esta Maude? Find out the reactions of children to James' experiences with the Giant Peach? Motivate the youngsters to travel with Pagoo and share Pagoo's many adventures? How well do they know Henry Huggins? Discover whether Old Yeller has the courage of a lion? Or whether Mrs. Frankweiler likes Jamie and Claudia?

I think that my categories of questions and the subquestions faithfully reflect the concerns of those who work with our public school children. Nowhere do I see in them a request or exhortation that specialists in reading serve as a clinician in a clinical set-up in an elementary school. Speaking as a principal, I am giving you my bias that public education cannot afford reading clinics in elementary schools. The questions my responders raised imply that specialists in reading should operate in the space--whether it be in the hall, on the stage, in the lunch-room--and with the materials and the equipment that are available within the

monetary limits of the building or district within which they work. I would hope to have such reading specialists that would be able to answer positively the questions we have asked. And as a principal, I hope that they will have the willingness to take a risk with the kinds of kids I have in my building. If they need encouragement, I will give it to them. If they need freedom to operate, they have it. If they need the support of me, my staff, and my community, I will see that they have it. One final and abiding thing do I ask, "Dear Reading Specialist, will you do anything--short of immorality--to teach these kids the tools that they need to get through our system as it is set up?"